

## Tiny Dancer by flippyspoon

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Angst, Billy's mom feels, Drama, M/M, Romance, Suicide, probably not as dark as you're thinking because it's me lol

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2018-07-13

**Updated:** 2018-07-16

**Packaged:** 2022-04-22 05:13:36

**Rating:** Mature

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 3

**Words:** 13,064

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Even Susan, as far as Billy knew, did not know the truth about his mother. Sometime he felt his mom was sitting there at the dinner table with them, watching their awful attempt at a happy family.

You left me alone with him, Billy thought, and shoved that feeling away.

He glared at his dad, now chatting with Max about school. It was his fault. That was easier. And it was probably the truth. It was his fault, not hers and when he tried to be angry at her for going away he felt sick to his stomach. She hadn't left him alone with his father, his father had made her go away.

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

FYI, the excerpt in the summary is not in this chapter.

OH YEAH also, credit to Highon85 on Tumblr for discovering that Billy wears Aramis by Estee Lauder.

“You seem like...a very angry boy, Billy.”

The guidance counselor had big fluffy brown hair and a mole under her nose and Billy thought she was ugly as hell as well as being really annoying. Steve Harrington, Billy thought, as he squinted at the woman wearing glasses with huge pink rims, also had big fluffy brown hair and a few little moles on his face and Billy thought Harrington was beautiful. Weird.

“Is there something you need?” Billy said flatly. He had tried the charm offensive and it had bounced right off the bitch.

“You broke the glass on the fire extinguisher box last week-”

“Yeah, yeah. I know. Just finished my detention.” Billy was edgy. He sighed heavily and shifted in his chair. The guidance counselors office was stuffy.

“Breaking the extinguisher box isn’t too bad,” the counselor said, waving a hand. “If there’s a fire. There wasn’t a fire. Why...did you do that? Has anyone asked?”

“Thought I smelled smoke.”

That wasn’t true. His father had come down to the school an hour before to ream him out in front of his friends for fucking up the Camaro’s transmission so bad it would take a couple hundred to fix and Billy needed to be driving to run errands and pick up Max and the old man had been *pissed* and then Billy had been pissed and then

whoops he'd punched his fist right through the fire extinguisher box next to chem class. People had seen him do it, he'd looked like a maniac. Steve Harrington had been standing right there talking to Michelle Michener and jumped about a mile at the sudden shattering of glass.

"How's your hand?" The guidance counselor said.

"Fine." His hand was still bandaged. He crossed his arms, hiding it.

"How are things at home?"

"Dandy."

The guidance counselor gave him that pitying look that certain kind of adults gave him a lot when they knew too much or thought they did. Billy flexed his bandaged hand, the sting of it was calming. The truth was, he had been very lucky not to score a suspension for the extinguisher incident. He had to play nice or they'd call the old man.

"Alright," the counselor sighed again. "You can go."

*Well, that was pointless*, Billy thought. He shot up from his seat and threw open the counselor's office door and almost tripped over a pair of blue Adidas, Steve Harrington's legs stretched out in front of him as he sat in one of the two small chairs in the secretary's area between the guidance counselor and the vice principal's offices.

"What're you here for?" Billy said, tossing Harrington a nod.

"None of your business," Steve said, clenched up like a fist.

Harrington looked like shit, kinda grey with dark circles under his eyes. Not that it mattered. Billy still wanted to bone him into the next century and he kicked Harrington's shoe. Steve looked up at him, dead serious and unafraid, eyes big and fixed on Billy like he was fully willing to get his ass handed to him again if he could get a few shots in first. Billy felt himself swell a little in his jeans.

Billy cackled and licked his teeth and imagined Steve sucking his top lip. Billy had been to not one, but two parties in the last month where multiple girls had proclaimed Steve Harrington the best kisser

at Hawkins High.

“Knock em’ dead, pretty boy.” He winked and shoved his hands in his pockets and swaggered out into the hall, whistling as he made his way back to English class.

---

In English class, Billy dug out his Faulkner and borrowed notes that he copied down quickly to catch up with the lecture. Detentions aside he was a good student and English was his favorite class albeit sometimes the most difficult. The classroom was as stuffy as the counselor’s office. He rubbed his neck as he handed the notes back to Carol, just as he realized his necklace was gone.

“Oh shit.”

Billy sat there, mouth agape, feeling around his neck as if his pendant might suddenly appear. It did not. He checked his bag and glanced around the classroom, ignoring the interested glances of girls. He shot up from his seat.

“Mr. Hargrove?” Mr. Pensky was frowning at him.

“I dropped something,” Billy said.

“You can find it after class-”

“It’s *important!*”

“Mr. Hargrove...” Pensky jaw twitched as he looked at Billy, who must have been wearing an expression of desperation because he waved a hand. “Alright. Go find it if you need to.”

He supposed it helped that he was pulling an A for Pensky.

Billy’s palms were sweating. He felt an odd chill in his feet as panic set in. He was so careful with the necklace. He didn’t always wear it, but he always knew exactly where it was and kept it on his person if he wasn’t wearing it. The clasp had come undone a few days before and he thought he’d bent it back into place well enough. It must have come undone again. How long ago? What if somebody had picked it up already? They probably had. Some chick hung up on him might hold onto it, or some freshman he’d bodychecked in the hallway.

Anybody. It wasn't as if he had any *true* friends at Hawkins High, not really. He had people he hung out with, but it was all based on status and social politicking-

"Fuck. Fuck fuck."

Billy stood in the middle of the hall and his neck felt cold. The necklace had been his mother's. There was not a lot of her left. He felt sick.

The bell for the end of class rang like a scream and Billy wanted to punch the extinguisher box again. He stood there, frozen, everyone shoving and passing around him, until Tommy clapped him on the back so hard he took a step.

"Practice!" Tommy said.

He was getting a migraine. Billy's head swam as he glared after Tommy. The reality that he had surely lost his mother's necklace for good settled on his shoulders. *The* necklace; the one he remembered playing with when he was little, when he'd sit next to her at the piano...

He remembered the pinkish light of the knock-off Tiffany lamp on the piano making his mother's hair look gold, endless waves of it down tumbling down around the pendant. He was little. He remembered being little and thinking the pendant was shiny and pretty as his mother patted his head and tried to play "Imagine" on the piano.

The piano had come from his mother's family. They'd kept it until the move to Hawkins and he'd hated the way it felt--like a slow punch to the kidneys--when he'd watched it getting carted out to a truck.

He'd have to search all the classrooms after practice. Maybe it had just slipped off in the counselor's office...

*Somebody will steal it.*

Hell, if he found a necklace, he'd probably keep it.

A lump formed in Billy's throat. He cried easy. He hated how easily he cried, it only made him angrier. Everything was a blur around him

as he made his way to the gym and in the boy's locker room, he kept to himself, making a ruckus as he changed clothes, glowering. He stood in his sneakers and his gym shorts and caught his reflection in a mirror on the wall, his expression bereft, the absence at his neck a little ache. Harrington was standing behind him, warily eyeing his reflection.

"Hey," Harrington said, and Billy spun around. Steve dug into his jeans pocket. "This is yours, right?" Steve Harrington was holding the necklace, the chain wound around his fingers, the pendant of Mary hanging down.

Billy let out a breath and said, "Shit. Where did you—"

"On the chair in Ms. Phelps's office."

"Phelps."

"The guidance counselor?"

"Oh."

Steve let the necklace fall into Billy's waiting hand. Billy was smiling without meaning to and Steve Harrington stepped back, as if recoiling, about to end the conversation.

"How'd you know this was mine?" Billy said, because he was curious about anything to do with Steve Harrington, especially anything that might *connect* him to Steve Harrington.

"What do you mean?" Steve took off his shirt and kicked off his shoes. "You wear it all the time."

Billy lowered his voice and said, "Paying close attention are ya, Harrington?"

"No." Steve unzipped his fly. "Just that the thing whips me in the face all the fuckin' time when we play. Asshole." He accidentally on purpose bumped into Billy as he passed, knocking him into a locker, and if Billy hadn't been so distracted by the lean but sturdy chest of Steve Harrington pressing his shoulder for just that moment, he would have pushed back.

His face was hot. There was no chance that Steve did things like that just because he wanted an excuse to touch Billy. But Billy could pretend if he wanted to. He studied the clasp of the necklace, leaning there against the locker for a minute. He could swear the crappy hook was more firmly closed than before. It looked better than when Billy had tried to fix it with his thick, blunt fingers. He looked after Harrington, who was just now pulling on his gym shorts, and wondered. Long and more narrow fingers like his would have done a better job fixing something so delicate. But why the hell would Harrington do it?

---

When he got home that day, he discovered quickly that the old man had heard about his little shenanigan with the fire extinguisher. It had happened a week ago. He'd thought he was safe. He'd been pretty lucky they hadn't called the old man right away.

"Are you crazy?" His father was asking him this very calmly, his forearm at Billy's throat as he stood on his tiptoes up against his closet. The corner of the open closet door was digging into his back. At least the arm was less painful than the fingers that had stifled his windpipe a moment before.

The old man had been working on his car and his fingers smelled like motor oil.

"No, sir," Billy said, wheezing a bit.

*You crazy bitch.*

His father had said that to his mom a lot. Sometime he called her "honey" or "dear" but more and more often towards the end, it was "you crazy bitch."

"This is a serious question," his father said. "You broke that glass case for no reason? What is the *matter* with you?"

"I dunno," Billy mumbled. He was choking a little and he teared up.

All at once his father let him go and Billy caught himself, stumbling a little, and rubbed his throat. Neil stomped over to the make-shift vanity by the window and threw a can of hairspray across the room.

“You know, you doll yourself up just like she did?”

“*Don’t*,” Billy said, clenching his teeth.

“Don’t...what?” His father looked at him, an eyebrow raised.

“Don’t talk about her,” Billy said, too quietly.

The old man glared and then he turned and swept his arm, all of Billy’s shit on the vanity made of crates tumbling to the floor, cigarette ash from the spilled ashtray dirtying the carpet. The old man picked Billy’s favorite cologne up off the floor and threw it against the wall so it shattered and the room suddenly smelled sharply of Aramis.

“That crazy bitch,” his father said. “You think I *want* you to end up like her? I don’t. That’s why-”

“Don’t call her that!” Billy screamed it and he heard a door slam, probably Max drowning it out.

His father picked up the little train case that Billy kept and threw that too. The case spilled open and Billy breathed in as his mother’s old make-up stash tumbled out

Billy didn’t wear the make-up. He really didn’t...except for the mascara and occasionally eyeliner and only when he could get away with it, but lots of guys did that now. He just liked to look at it. He liked the smell of it when he opened the case. He could close his eyes and picture her in the messy bathroom, swaying in a long flowing Gunne Sax dress all covered in tiny flowers and cream lace, looking like a good witch as she tested a lipstick on the back of her hand. All those fun little containers full of powders and creams. She let him play with it. She would put an Eagles record on and laugh while she painted him with blue eyeshadow. It was like a game. When he opened the case he could put himself there again. The old roses smell of her foundation, the weird mustiness of lipsticks, and that bottle of White Shoulders...

A half a pack of Virginia Slims from 1979 was on the carpet amongst the lipsticks and blushes.



“What...the *hell* is this?” His father said. “You goddam fa-”

“I don’t *wear* it or anything,” Billy said, only lying a little. “It’s just...It’s hers, I just wanted to-”

“It goes,” his father. “Be a goddamn man.”

Neil Hargrove held the bin while Billy picked all the make-up off the floor, every last bit of it including the pack of Virginia Slims and the Avon catalogue from ‘75 and tossed it in the trash.

“Trashcan out front,” his father said. “I’m watching you take it out.”  
“Yes, sir.”

“Putting your fist through glasses cases, keeping make-up...” His father was looking at him like he was possibly a serial killer or maybe worse; just as gay and crazy as he had feared.

“You need to grow up, Billy. Your mother never grew up. She was a silly, sick woman and she let herself-”

Billy didn’t listen to the speech, given in a hushed voice because his dad never wanted Susan to hear him talking about Billy’s mother. Billy didn’t even know how much Susan knew about her, that was how little they talked about the past. His head was buzzing with anger and he had to sit on it like a caged tiger and wait them all out, cooped up in his little room that was always too warm. It had been nice in winter but spring had come around and his room still felt like an oven. He always woke up sweating. Billy cracked the window and smoked and listened to Anthrax on his Walkman while he did homework until everyone was asleep.

---

At eleven o’clock, Billy grabbed the empty case and a flashlight and his keys and went out to the trash cans behind the house and, as quietly as possible, he dug the make-up out of the garbage. Some of the lipsticks had come open and the colors were covered in coffee grounds and spaghetti sauce. He grunted in annoyance as he picked out every tube and lid and container and brush and pencil. He picked

out the Virginia Slims too and the Avon catalogue and the empty perfume bottle with the little tasseled pump. He tossed it all in the case and took it out to his car, setting it on the passenger seat, and before he could think twice about it, he pulled out and went driving.

Hawkins was empty as a tomb late at night, especially during the week, and Billy floored it and cranked Sabbath and screamed at nothing, pounding the wheel with the hand still bandaged from the extinguisher case. He had originally told his father it was an accident in shop class.

He almost plowed right into Steve Harrington's BMW.

"FUCK." Billy broke with a sharp squeal and lurched forward in his seat, his head whipping back with a jolt, the make-up case thrown to the floor and busting open yet again."What the hell."

The BMW was parked half in the street in the dark. The lights weren't on.

Billy parked and turned off the radio, the abrupt quiet feeling eerie. He got out of the car and stood there in the darkness of the road. He was out in the woods now because that was a fun place to drive crazy as long as there weren't any animals wandering around. The whiplash hadn't done his already sore neck any favors and he rubbed at it, the thin chain of his necklace reassuring under his fingers. He lit himself a cigarette and stalked over to Harrington's car; empty. A chill ran up Billy's spine.

A lot of things didn't quite add up about Steve Harrington, not the least of which was what had happened at the Byers' in November. Billy could hardly remember the fight, his memories blurred from whatever Max had knocked him out with and he only vaguely remembered that she had knocked him out with something and possibly only because the sting of the syringe had stayed with him for a day. His Camaro had come home scuffed and he'd been *pissed* but his father only shrugged and told him to buff it out. He had been in charge of Max and he'd dropped the ball. He'd paid dearly for it. He'd wanted answers from Harrington when he'd seen him after that but the sight of his fucked up pretty face kept Billy's mouth shut.

Billy had let it drop. The enormity of Billy letting something drop went unappreciated. If only Steve Harrington knew what a miraculous state of events that was. But Harrington didn't give a shit about Billy Hargrove. Steve generally avoided him like the plague. Billy had to goad to get so much as eye contact. That look in Ms. Phelps' office had been thrilling. Steve pushing into him in the locker room...

"Harrington!" Billy cupped his hands around his mouth and hollered. This wasn't any of his business but he needed to know. It occurred to him he'd left a flashlight in his car and now he grabbed it, shut the door, lit a cigarette, and went into the woods. "Hey, Harrington!"

What he was going to do when he found Steve Harrington, he had no idea. Maybe Steve was just out here smoking weed or something. That could be interesting.

Then again, maybe he was out here boning a girl...in the woods. Which would be weird. And hot, but also upsetting. Billy smoked and forgot to holler. He didn't know his way in the woods. It was probably dumb as hell to wander around in them in the middle of the night. For all he knew there were bears. Were there bears in Indiana? If there were woods, there were probably bears, right? Except they were smaller outside the West. That much he knew.

Billy almost tripped over the nail bat.

He did remember Max with the nail bat. That message had penetrated the haze of a tranquilizer. Was it Steve's? What the hell was he doing with a bat full of nails? Billy picked it up and took a tentative step, swinging it around in one hand.

"Hey...Steve?" Billy said. He sounded as if he was calling for a friend.

He heard the crying before he saw Steve, who *must* have heard him coming but he only sat there under the harshness of Billy's flashlight, up against a tree with his legs folded up, his head in his hands.

"Harrington," Billy said.

Steve sniffed and startled, gaping up at him. He got to his feet and

wiped his nose on his arm. "Shit..."

"What are you *doing*?" Billy said.

"Nothing," Steve mumbled. He nodded at the nail bat. "Gimme that."

Billy shined the flashlight in Steve's face. His eyes were red, his cheeks streaked with tears. *Jesus*. "What're you crying about?"

"Gimme the fucking bat!"

"Tell me what you're doing first!"

"Fuck you!"

That was when the monster showed up.

## 2. Chapter 2

Steve had been falling asleep in class because he could never seem to sleep at night anymore. Or rather, he fell asleep in Econ., French, and Study Hall. Study Hall was the worst. He was left to his own devices in a quiet room and it was near the end of the day. How did everyone not fall asleep in Study Hall? He had been sent to Ms. Phelps to discuss his sleeping problem. That had gone nowhere but they weren't calling his parents what with him being eighteen and it being so close to graduation. He didn't fall asleep in his other classes and he *knew* why. Steve had English, Trig., Civics, and his art elective with Billy Hargrove. Steve never fell asleep in a class with Billy Hargrove. After the fight, that had been a measure of self-preservation. He was too on guard to allow himself to fall asleep even when he was exhausted. But he also started watching Billy. He watched Hargrove like a hawk. He congratulated himself on how well he paid attention to Billy Hargrove while appearing as if he were totally ignoring him and only acknowledging him when he needed to be reminded that Steve Harrington was not afraid to fight.

*Act like you don't care*, he'd told Dustin. It also worked for assholes like Billy. Although, as of late, Steve had found himself compelled by Billy as a person. Watching Hargrove felt a little more like a hobby now. There was, for example, the time Neil Hargrove had found Billy at school during lunch and read him the riot act. It had been awful to watch--Steve had enjoyed Billy's humiliation for a minute and then just felt shitty--and Billy had just taken it like he was used to that shit. Later that day he'd put his hand right through the fire extinguisher box. Steve had seen him do it. He'd been talking to Michele Michener about...he forgot about wha. He had not been paying attention to the conversation. He'd been watching Billy pace around, obviously stewing, and then BAM. Billy had fucked up his hand and everything and then just stood there staring at his bloody knuckles.

Two weeks ago Steve had gone to a party and waited til Tommy was good and drunk before he asked about Billy. He was on speaking terms with Tommy again. Thought it wasn't like it had been and it never would be. But Steve was relieved they were friendly and

Tommy did seem to be trying to act like less of a tool, at least around him. Steve suspected that getting his ass handed to him *again* had something to do with it. When Tommy had seen his face after the fight with Hargrove, he'd paled like Steve had died or something.

"What's the deal with Hargrove?" Steve had asked, once he got Tommy alone.

"Billy?" Tommy shrugged. "I dunno. He's kind of a psycho, but you know that better than anybody. The girls are all kinda through with him so I dunno who he's going with anymore... His dad beats the shit out of him."

"He does?" Steve didn't know why he'd been surprised. The way Neil Hargrove had acted when he'd tracked down his son at school... He'd said some pretty horrific things and then left before a teacher could step in.

"Yeah, everybody knows that," Tommy said. "I mean don't tell Billy everybody knows that. He'll be pissed. He does seem to like *you*, Steve."

Steve had stared at Tommy, sure he'd heard that wrong. "What?"

"He talks about you all the time when he drinks, like he really wants to be friends with you or something. It's weird."

"He kicked my ass!"

"Yeah well... you saw him with the fire extinguisher thing. He's nuts. He's fun though! Cool as hell! Hope he shows tonight!"

So that had been a strange conversation.

Then he'd found the necklace. Finding the necklace stuck between the arm and the cushion of the chair in Ms. Phelps' office, Steve had felt like Indiana Jones happening upon some priceless artifact. The necklace was *important* to Billy, or at least Steve had suspected that. He'd sat in Econ. after that and he had not fallen asleep. He hadn't paid attention to the talk about "supply side" either, he was too busy examining the pendant. Steve didn't know from religion but it was obviously Mary, St. Mary, the Virgin Mary, whatever she was

properly called. The necklace also seemed old. It was a weird choice for Hargrove, or at least Steve thought so. Also, the clasp was crappy. Steve found himself bending the hook of the clasp closed with his nimble fingers. The chain was long enough that Billy could easily slip it over his head anyway. He probably preferred that to the chain coming unhooked all the time.

He wasn't sure why he'd done it, only that being helpful felt more natural than not.

Billy had smiled when Steve had given it back. It wasn't one of his sly smiles or smirks or asshole grins. Billy had smiled, soft and genuine. Steve had assumed Billy wasn't capable of the emotion that made that sort of smile. He'd felt horribly drawn to Billy in that moment and stepped back, vaguely horrified.

Billy was *hot*, that was just a fact and Steve liked boys as well as girls, but he didn't need this shit. This shit, he decided, was the very last thing he needed. Not when he couldn't even sleep. Not when he had nightmares when he could sleep. He dreamed that there were still some demodogs left in the woods even though the gate was supposed to be closed. The dreams were so convincing it was hard to think of other things sometimes. In the middle of the night, Steve found himself awake and staring at the ceiling and thinking about monsters. He'd driven out to the woods and locked his keys in his car. Another thing to add to the list, but he wasn't so far from home, if he cut through the woods...the woods that might be filled with monsters. He'd started wandering around looking for them. But the lack of sleep fucked with him, made him feel mentally exhausted and overwhelmed and want to bust out crying.

Then he had.

Of course Billy had to find him at exactly the wrong moment.

---

“Shit! Gimme that!” The demodog came out of nowhere and it pounced, headed straight for Billy. Billy was staring, blankly, and Steve grabbed the bat and jumped to get between them and with a

wild swing he caught the demodog in its side, sending it sailing into a tree. He took just that second of grace to look around and didn't see anything else, and then he went at the demodog with all his strength, spinning the bat loosely in his hand to relieve his fist for a moment, and finishing the dog off with a plunge of nailed wood right through it's open toothy face. The thing was limp on the ground and Steve stood back, watching it, hearing only Billy's breath and his own. He spun the bat again. Spinning the bat around in his hand had become a habit, the little gesture gave him a feeling of power.

*I can do this, because look at this cool move.*

He scratched his cheek. He'd been sobbing from pure exhaustion a moment ago, and full of fear that exactly this scenario would go down.

Steve felt so much better suddenly, as if now that he knew there were still monsters around he could relax and stop worrying about whether there were still monsters around.

"You alright?" Steve said, without turning to look back at Billy.

Billy said, "Yeah?"

Steve said, "What're you-" The creaking haunting call of a demogorgon interrupted, sounding much too close, and Steve grabbed Billy's hand. "Shit! C'mon!" He couldn't see the thing but he could hear it. "Cmon! C'mon!"

Billy didn't ask questions, he just ran after Steve, their hands clasped. They raced through the woods and Steve jumped logs and leapt over ditches and Billy stumbled a couple of times. Steve's blood raced as helped Billy along, keeping him upright, and ran again.

The Camaro was parked right next to the BMW just as Steve had hoped and eyes wide, he slapped the passenger's side window as if it would open by magic and Billy ran around to the driver's side.

"C'MON, GET IN! GET IN! GET IN!" Steve said.

"Yeah yeah yeah! Fuck!" Billy yelped and got in, unlocking the doors.



Steve slipped inside, careful not to puncture himself with his own bat, and he thought he saw the glimpse of a petaled face at the edge of the woods just as Billy sped away. He hoped the thing wouldn't trash his car or something.

He would need to call Hopper, if Hopper didn't already know.

"Harrington, what the fuck!"

"Just drive okay."

"Where?"

"Anywhere! Just... Go into town." Steve sat back in seat and grimaced, realizing he was sitting on something uncomfortable. He reached under his butt and felt around, grabbing a bunch of lipsticks and a perfume bottle.

Steve said, "What the..."

"Just put that on the floor," Billy said. "But try not to step on shit. What the *hell* is going on, Harrington?"

"Hawkins has monsters," Steve said.

Billy snorted and looked over at him, disbelieving. "That's it? Hawkins has monsters? What the-"

"It's a long story," Steve said. "Just... That thing I killed is called a demodog and a much bigger thing that's like, related to it, was on its way. So we ran."

"Jesus Christ," Billy muttered. He seemed almost amused.

Billy drove them to a liquor store on the edge of Hawkins, the only thing open this late because truckers often drove through town in the night. They parked on the street and sat in the glow of neon for a minute. Steve moved his foot and sent lipsticks knocking around and Billy looked at him, wary.

"You fight monsters on the regular like this?"

Steve thought about that for a second and blinked. He could still feel the bat in his hand, he'd gripped it so hard to take a swing and get the thing away from Billy. "Kinda," Steve said.

"What was chasing us when he ran?" Billy said.

"It's...big." Steve's mouth felt dry. He wanted a Coke...and a cigarette sounded really good about now. He wasn't the least bit tired. "It walks on two legs... It's a lot harder to kill than a demodog. Um...I'm gonna get a soda."

In the liquor store he wandered a little, the night feeling surreal with the quick killing of a demodog and goddamn *Billy Hargrove* doing...whatever it was they were doing. He should've asked Billy to take him home but he hated being home when he couldn't sleep. He'd need to get his keys from his car the next day.

*Idiot.*

Steve grabbed a coke and watched Billy at the register, who casually bought a pint of Jim Beam like it was nothing. The guy at the counter didn't even card him. Billy threw him a wink, and outside, Steve said, "How'd you do that?"

Billy smirked and opened his mouth as if to say one thing, and seemed to change his mind. He laughed and said, "I don't know."

"What do you mean?"

"I never get carded," Billy said, shrugging. "It's like a super power or something. I haven't gotten carded since I was fourteen. Dead serious. Guess I just look old."

"That's a super power alright," Steve said. "No wonder you're popular."

"Fuck you," Billy said, and they stopped to lean on the car, facing each other. "I don't tell anybody. Like I want every chick to bug me to go pick up their Boone's Farm strawberry shit or whatever the hell."

"Boone's Farm," Steve said, chuckling.

Billy uncapped the whiskey and took a swallow and handed it over to Steve. "Hold this a minute. And move."

Steve stuck his stuff atop the car and sipped the whiskey, watching Billy open the passenger side and squat, carefully packing the make-up all over the floor into a green case. It took him a while as he reached under the seat and grabbed bits and pieces stuck there and went around to the back to see what had rolled out of his reach. Steve had polished off half the Jim Beam by the time he was done and Billy gave him a sour look as he took his bottle back.

"Fuck, Harrington."

Steve dug a crumpled ten spot out of his pocket and handed it over. "For your trouble." He said with an affected air, it was something his dad said when he tipped people.

He watched Billy perk up and grab the money. "Not turning that down."

They leaned and smoked and drank and ended up sitting on the hood. They didn't talk much. Steve made an internal note that neither of them should really drive for a while, though he imaged Billy would fight him on it. At least the roads were clear, he thought.

"So," Billy said now, as he lit up his third cigarette. "You went to the woods to go looking for those monsters?"

"Um...yeah. Yes."

"Pretty badass with that bat." Billy said.

"I have some experience," Steve said flatly. He pretended to himself that he wasn't a little flattered. "What were you doing out there?"

"Driving." Billy's grin fell and he stared out at the street.

"Hmm." Steve reached into his pocket for a lighter and found instead found one of Billy's lipsticks that must've gotten in there and he inspected it; an old tube of Avon in a gold case. The color was called "Wild Coral." He opened the tube, absently fidgeting. "What is this? Coffee grounds?"

Billy looked over at him and his eyes flashed for a moment. "The make-up isn't mine," was all he said.

"I didn't think it was." He looked at Billy funny and thought about Billy's dad coming down to the school and the fire extinguisher box and the necklace... "It's your mom's. Isn't it?"

There was a cricket chirping somewhere as Steve handed the lipstick over to Billy who said, "Yeah." He watched Billy carefully wipe the coffee grounds off the coral stick and he drew a little stripe on the back of his bandaged hand that held a cigarette. "It got thrown out by accident. I dug it out of the garbage." He drew himself up and looking away he said, "Yeah, my dad would be really pissed if her shit got thrown out. So...whatever. Coffee grounds."

It was warm for such a late spring night and Steve felt a drop sweat slide down his neck and under his shirt. "So she's..."

"Dead," Billy said, taking a drag.

Steve opened his mouth to say "sorry" and stopped because he remembered that Nancy had always hated when people said "sorry" after Barb had died. Instead he said, "That sucks," and took a sip of his Coke. Billy capped the lipstick and gave it back to Steve as if he might want to inspect it further. Steve turned it in his hands and slipped it in his pocket absentmindedly, once again mistaking it for a lighter because it was late at night and he was buzzed and he'd just killed a demodog. Billy wasn't paying attention now as he talked.

"She used to wear that color to the beach," Billy said. "We went all the time. Like not even to do anything. Just to sit. Or, I dunno, sometimes she'd fuck around in the waves. In her dress and all."

Steve watched Billy Hargrove let his guard down and thought he might be having an out of body experience. He dimly wondered if the demogorgon had found him and killed him and this was some bizarre afterlife.

*He does seem to like you, Steve.*

"I used to go with Tommy's family to the lake," Steve blurted out.

“Um. Sometimes. I mean my parents were always doing something... Busy, so...we didn’t really *hang out*, me and my parents? Ya know. We went on vacations, I guess. Once in a while. Out to Florida or... see my aunt and... But we didn’t really *do* things together.” Steve shut his mouth and shook his head slightly, taking a sip of Coke and fumbling for cigarettes he didn’t have on him before Billy offered one.

“Well, I was a little kid,” Billy said. “Wasn’t like I was some mama’s boy. And my mom was real cool, she wasn’t some stuffy bitch.”

Steve catalogued that Billy was implying his own mother *was* some stuffy bitch and he smiled into his Coke, inwardly agreeing.

“Yeah, we hung out all the time,” Billy said, and took a long swallow of whiskey. “Died when I was twelve.”

“Oh.” Steve frowned. Somehow twelve seemed like a particularly bad age to lose a mom.

“She liked to dance on the beach.” Billy mumbled around his cigarette, his eyes lowered. Steve watched the flutter of his thick eyelashes, the way he rested his pink lips softly on the smoke like it might fall out any second. “Thought it was embarrassing as shit later but...” He didn’t finish the sentence. Steve wondered if Billy had used to dance with his mom on the beach. It wasn’t something he could picture his own mom doing in a million years.

*He’s really beautiful*, Steve thought, and turned his gaze back to the street, dark and endless. He couldn’t think of a thing to say and now he was bothered by the thought that Billy Hargrove was beautiful.

“Let’s listen to some tunes, huh?” Billy said.

They sat with the doors open and Billy turned the dial, looking for something decent. Van Halen came on and they sat, half in and half out of the car, and smoked.

“It’s almost two and there’s school tomorrow.” Billy’s gaze slid over to Steve. “That doesn’t bother you?”

“I really don’t sleep anymore,” Steve said. “Except in class.”

"I've never seen you sleep in class."

"That's 'cause I can't sleep if you're-" He licked his lips and laughed to himself. "I mean... Nah, I dunno. Econ. and French are brutal." He focussed on his cigarette for a while, nodding to the music. Billy was staring at him, he could feel it. The gaze felt like some warm tingling thing, burning into him pleasantly. He wanted to see Billy's expression but he kept his eyes on the spiraling cigarette smoke, certain that if he looked up at Billy, something would *happen*. He wasn't sure what exactly.

"I dream about the monsters," Steve said.

"I dream my mom's still alive," Billy said.

"Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" came on the radio and Billy reached over and switched the station almost before Steve had recognized the song. It was one he particularly liked.

"Not an Elton John fan?" Steve said, and risked a glance at Billy.

"Do I look like one?" Billy and took another swallow of Jim Beam.

Steve watched a drop of bourbon slide down his throat and all the way down to the chest half revealed by an open shirt. "No," Steve said. "Guess not." He snorted a laugh because the whole thing, the whole night, struck him as hilarious suddenly. The laugh bubbled up and he covered his mouth with the back of his hand, giggling helplessly, and feeling a bit drunk.

Billy looked delighted and sat up, staring at him. "What the hell's wrong with you?"

"I...I don't know," Steve said, breathless with laughter. "This is just so goddamn weird." He shut his eyes and gave in to the good feeling of letting go for a while and then he was holding stomach, laughing so hard his head hurt, his stomach tight. "S-so goddamn *weird*..." Billy didn't say anything or at least Steve wasn't aware of it as he lost shit about nothing, his laughs echoing in the quiet of the empty street. He gradually caught his breath and sat back in his seat. He rubbed his eyes, his body somehow looser and thawed, as if somebody had just

given him a good massage. He hadn't laughed like that in such a long time, definitely not since the break-up. He turned his head, feeling lazy, and saw Billy whose expression he couldn't place at all except that he didn't look annoyed, which was good since Billy was his ride back home.

They were both buzzed enough, Steve presumed, that maybe it didn't matter the way he was staring at Billy now, thinking that he really was beautiful and trying to work out what he might be thinking. But he really couldn't have guessed what Billy said next.

"Why did Nancy Wheeler break up with you?"

Steve snorted at that. "She didn't love me and she liked Jonathan." He shrugged. "Would've liked to have known that about last year but...That's life."

Billy's brows twitched, his eyes flitting around as if he working out a different math problem. His tongue curled up over his teeth. "Huh."

"Yep."

"Hey, Harrington... I'm..."

"What?"

"I'm sorry about..." Billy waved a hand around. "Ya know."

"Beating me to a pulp?"

"Sure. Yeah. That."

"Hmm." Steve considered that for a moment and said, "I got a few hits in."

"You got one good hit in," Billy said. "The other ones I let you have."

"Yeah, well you cheated with the whole plate thing-"

"It's not *cheating*. Fighting is fighting."

"If I'd known we could fight dirty-"

“All fighting is dirty!”

“Is it?” Steve said, and found himself grinning.

“Oh, it’s *very* dirty,” Billy said, his voice low. It was like a come on, a strange one, and Steve’s mouth was hanging open. Steve smiled, a little confused and a little turned on. He huffed and scratched his neck.

“Well, no more dirty fighting, asshole,” Steve said.

“Won’t lay a hand on you.” Billy said. “Less you ask me too.”

*That* sounded like a come on and Steve couldn’t think how to respond to it so instead he said, “Or the kids...”

“Nah, I won’t...do that shit.” He looked *sort* of ashamed. Steve wondered where this was coming from.

*He does seem to like you, Steve.*

They stayed out until the sun began to rise.



### 3. Chapter 3

Billy did not sleep at all. He went home around five o'clock in the morning which was just enough time to pretend to be up early and shower and make himself look as if he had slept. He felt the ache of an all-nighter in his bones and he knew he'd be dead on his feet in school. It was all more than worth it. So much had happened in the course of the night that his room looked different, as if he'd been away for weeks. He'd spent *hours* in the company of Steve Harrington just shooting the shit, a little buzzed until they'd switched to just Coke. They'd smoked so much his throat felt raw. His head was full of Steve Harrington's voice, it echoed as if pieces of it had been left inside him like phantoms. The sight of Steve Harrington jumping to save him (a confusing knock to his manhood), swinging the nail bat like some kinda movie badass was imprinted in his mind, as was the sight of him smiling at him, at *him* . There was also the memory of Steve Harrington laughing, clutching his stomach like he couldn't help himself, seeming half-delirious. Billy had wanted to kiss him so badly so many times it had given him a headache. But that was impossible. Whatever. It didn't matter. If he behaved himself just a little, he might get to see Steve laughing like that again.

*Steve Harrington...*

"What're you so happy about?" Max seemed wary as Billy pulled out of the driveway.

Billy had a stupid urge to share some bit of his excitement with somebody and Max had used to be almost an ally before he'd become so pissed at everybody within arm's length. But Billy blamed the lack of sleep on the way he suddenly blurted out: "I saw Steve Harrington last night."

"You didn't hurt him did you?"

" No. No." He shrugged, watching the road, thinking of Steve laughing because he'd said something lewd and stupid. "We weren't fighting. It was just me and Harrington, ya know...hanging out."

Shit, he sounded like a girl. He probably had little cartoon hearts

dancing over his head.

“What?” Max narrowed her eyes.

“Jesus. Nevermind. Forget it.”

They were quiet until he pulled into the middle school. Max opened the door and said to Billy, “If you hurt Steve Harrington again, I will kill you. I’m *serious* .” She had that way of setting her mouth about something like you could break rocks against her.

“Deal,” Billy said, nodding curtly.

She frowned at that and cast him one last confused glance before skating off into the scattered bunch of puberty-stricken kids in front of school. Billy smirked to himself but as he pulled into the Hawkins High lot it occurred to him that all of the night before might have been an isolated incident. There was a chance Steve would act like none of it had happened. That’s how Billy would act if things were just a couple degrees different; if he hadn’t just been poring over the make-up and thinking of his mother, if Steve hadn’t just given him back his necklace...

Billy stepped out of his car and lit a cigarette and tried to look like he didn’t give a shit.

“Hey!” That was Steve, walking right up to him in the parking lot and smiling, circles like old tires dark under his eyes. Steve had two cups of coffee from Dairy Queen in his hands and he handed one to Billy. “You look as shitty as I do.”

Billy took the coffee and scrambled for something normal to say and settled on, “Nice, Harrington. Real nice. After all I’ve done for you.”

“Wow.” Steve nodded, pretending gravity. “You gave me a ride after I *saved your life* . You’re right. I’m so sorry-”

“Okay okay,” Billy said, and he had to bite back a too-wide smile. “I see what’s happening. Dickhead.”

“And I brought you coffee.”

Billy took a swallow and tossed Harrington a nod, afraid if he opened his mouth again he might say something really stupid but then Steve was talking about shoving his dad out of bed to get help with his car. His dad had grumbled but it hadn't been too bad. Billy sort of wondered if his dad had even asked him why he'd been parked in the woods in the middle of the night but apparently it hadn't come up. Then things suddenly felt easy. He and Steve were chatting and drinking coffee and hanging around at Billy's locker like it was no big deal. They did catch a few surprised glances and they walked into first period together, two kings of Hawkins, Indiana, like they owned the school. Billy was exhausted and giddy.

He sat at the one lefty desk in the room and stretched his legs out and Steve sat right next to him which was not his usual seat.

He leaned over and whispered, "You know, you can't tell anyone about...the thing?"

"Sure," Billy said, and when he turned his head just a little bit, Steve's mouth touched his ear.

"It's just between us." Steve leaned back and fixed him with his wide brown eyes.

*Just between us .*

"Like I want anybody to know *you* saved my ass," Billy said and he turned a little more so Steve could see that he was smiling at him.

He could feel Steve's soft little laugh and then he said, "Asshole," like it was now something sweet.

Or maybe Billy was just imagining it that way. But the thought of it made him press his lips together as he turned back in his seat and opened his notebook.

---

He kept dreaming about his mother being alive. She was driving his car, picking him up from school, or pounding on the front door. He dreamed of the fight with Steve and saw her standing next to the kids, watching him pound Harrington into a pulp, her Avon dusted

blue eyes sad. He couldn't stand it and he thought it wasn't fair that five years after her death, he would still be dreaming of her. He stewed over it alone in the Camaro and drew lipstick stripes on the back of his hand.

But away from home, there was Steve.

For days Billy basked in the sunshine of Steve Harrington not hating him. Even more than that, they had inside jokes now. They had shared cigarettes behind the gym and slaps on the back during practice. Steve told him it was a relief to have somebody else who *knew* around who wasn't Wheeler or Byers and wasn't thirteen-years-old. Billy had Harrington whispering snide comments in his ear, and rolling his eyes when Billy reached over and casually drew a detailed dick on his class notes.

Steve brought coffee for the both of them every morning because he still wasn't sleeping and Billy seemed to like the coffee.

It almost got all fucked up one afternoon when Harrington went too far.

"That necklace..."

They were in the showers. Billy considered the showers with Steve a complicated kind of utopia. He could almost openly appreciate Harrington's naked body in the showers and he usually managed to make it without getting hard at all, though there had been close calls. Possibly that had been easier when Steve was ignoring him but now Steve was *talking* to him, chatting away while they stood there in the buff and looking right at Billy with eye contact and everything which meant that A. Billy had to think about the periodic table or something to get around an unwanted erection and that B. he couldn't treat himself to a dropped gaze. He allowed himself just one peek at Harrington's package usually. He wasn't sure how anybody avoided looking at Harrington's package which, in shipping terms, was more freight than parcel.

He had just been about to go for it when Steve said, "That necklace...it's your mom's, right?"

Then he stepped right up to Billy, close enough that if Billy took a

half step their *dicks would be touching* and said, "It's Mary?" Steve picked the pendant up off Billy's neck, but he rested his hand on Billy's chest as he looked at it. The pendate lay over Steve's palm, his knuckles warm and wet against Billy's heart.

Billy lost his breath and a jolt of anger made him clench his jaw. This was *too* much. Billy was naked and defenseless and about to pop wood at any second and how dare goddamn Harrington touch him like this and *then* invoke his mother, he wanted to shove Harrington so he'd know better-

"Obviously," Billy snarled when he said it, and he saw Steve's confusion just before Tommy broke in.

"Hey! You guys want to go to the quarry tonight? Bunch of us are going."

Steve dropped his hand and backed up with a jerk and he looked to Billy. It did not occur to Billy on any level that he was friendly enough with Steve now that whether he was going to something or not might matter, but Steve kept *looking* at him as if waiting for some signal. Finally Steve said, "Nah. I haven't slept in forever. I'm about to pass out."

"Pussy," Tommy said. "Hargrove? C'mon. We'll have weed."

"I dunno," Billy said. "Yeah, maybe I'll show."

He wanted Steve to care that he was going, to be assured their plans did not align.

"Righteous!" Tommy pumped his fist and Billy exchanged an amused expression with Steve which clearly said that Tommy was a huge dork and Billy forgot why he'd been pissed.

Steve watched Tommy walk away and said, "Forget that quarry shit. Wanna go hunt monsters with me? I'll bring a flask."

Steve was looking at him like he already knew the answer and he was right.

"Hell yeah," Billy said.

*“Righteous,”* Steve said in a deliberately goofy voice, and he pumped his fist.

“He’s such a dumbass,” Billy said with a snort.

Steve seemed a little pleased by that. It felt as if they had their own little club apart from everyone else. “Pick me up at six?” Steve said.

Billy did some quick math concerning homework and whatever the old man was currently demanding of him and said, “Seven.”

“Okay.” Steve spun on his heel and slapped Billy’s wet shoulder all playful-like. “Later.”

---

That evening as Billy sat at dinner playing good son and being careful not to step out of line, it occurred to him that Steve’d had plenty of time to examine the necklace when he’d found it. There was really no reason for him to pick it up again and get a closer look at it, to touch Billy like that. The revelation made his skin hot.

“Are you hiding anything else in there?” The old man looked suspicious tonight. He asked Billy this question at dinner in front of Max and Susan. Billy flushed, not for the embarrassment of the question but because he wondered if Max knew he’d been keeping his mother’s make-up.

“No, sir.” He was laying and if his dad had a mind to he could discover that easily himself. Billy was holding onto his mother’s record player and a few of her albums. They were hidden in the bottom of his closet. Officially, his father had never made any kind of rule about him keeping his mother’s things but it seemed to bother him. He kept saying that Billy couldn’t end up like her, as if him having her things would make it happen by magic.

His father sighed and his gaze went to the pendant as Billy politely ate Susan’s five-layer salad. “You can keep the necklace,” his father said.

Even Susan did not know the truth about his mother. Sometime he

felt like his mom was sitting there at the table with them, watching their awful attempt at a happy family.

*You left me alone with him* , Billy thought, and shoved that feeling away. He glared at his dad, now chatting with Max about school. It was his fault. That was easier. And it was probably the truth. It was his fault, not hers, and when he tried to be angry at her for going away he felt sick to his stomach. She hadn't left him alone with his father, his father had made her go away.

Billy settled on that and ate his dinner.

Billy ran late, not least because he changed his clothes a few times. He finally settled on a Henley because something about it said monster fighting and he also knew just how nicely it clung to his muscles. His hair took another twenty minutes but he pulled up to the Harrington's just after seven and honked the horn.

Steve was wearing an orange and green plaid shirt. There was something about the looseness of him, his sleeves rolled up, his hem untucked, the first couple of buttons undone as Steve pushed back his hair with one hand and spun his nail bat with the other, a backpack over one shoulder, that made Billy die a little.

Steve got in the car and said, "Hey." He settled the bat carefully between his knees.

"You got the flask?" Billy said.

"I got the flask," Steve said. "Hold your horses, Hargrove. Jesus."

Billy cackled and pulled out with a lurch and on the way, Steve lit a cigarette for him from his own pack, taking the first drag. "So," Billy said, "you have nightmares about the last time you ran into these fuckin' demodogs or whatever. But you go out looking for em'?"

"Yeah, well...I always get sucked into fighting em' anyways," Steve said. He looked just as tired as usual. "And better me than the rugrats."

Steve had explained parts of the whole monster thing. Some things he said he couldn't talk about and mumbled about "men in black" and

other parts he seemed confused about, but the long and short of it was that there weren't supposed to be any monsters left in the woods but also there appeared to be at least a few monsters left in the woods. He'd talked to the chief of police about what he'd seen the other night but kept Billy's name out of it.

He had also sworn he wouldn't go after them.

"I figure there can't be many around," Steve said, almost talking to himself. "Or somebody would've been killed or missing and there aren't any reports. So they must have been left behind after the gate closed and somehow still alive. Kinda counting on that meaning they're weakened."

"The gate," Billy repeated, as he sped down the road.

"Ugh. I don't feel like explaining it," Steve said. "And I really shouldn't."

"I've already seen the goddamn monsters, Harrington."

"Yeah well, I'm protecting you, alright? From...something other than just monsters. Think of it that way."

"Protecting me..." Billy cackled, the thought seemed hilarious. "Thank God I've got Steve Harrington to stand between me and danger-"

"I literally saved your life like a few days ago," Steve said.

"Alright alright. Yeah, *technically* -"

"Such a dick," Steve said, and his smile was toothy.

They parked about where Billy had found him just a few nights before and the air was cool and crisp. Crickets were chirping loud enough to break up the eerie silence of the woods but the forest seemed less dangerous with Steve spinning his bat in one hand, walking jauntily as they headed into the dark.

"Isn't the cop gonna be pissed if he finds out you did exactly what you said you weren't gonna do?" Billy said, sucking on his smoke.



“Then let’s not tell him, huh?” Steve nudged him. “Listen, I’m gonna give you the bat but if you see something, tell me before you just start swinging. I bought some fire. It’s good to set them on fire. The bat really just stuns em’ for second, it works better for the dogs *if* there aren’t too many.”

Billy looked away, smoking, pretending Steve Harrington hadn’t just scared the shit out of him and also wildly impressed him. The reality of their little quest finally settled in. Steve was looking for whatever was “bigger than a demodog” but the thought of *setting a monster on fire* seemed...edgier than he would have imagined for somebody like Steve Harrington. It seemed more like something *he* would do. He was sure, however, that he’d be great at the monster fighting.

The demodog didn’t count, he decided.

Steve handed Billy a flashlight and he scanned the forest as they traipsed through leaves and over logs, off any recognizable path. He walked close enough to Harrington that he kept bumping into him, their forearms brushing. It was a warm night and neither of them had worn jackets.

“Why’d you really bring me out here, man?” Billy said and aimed the light at Steve for just a second, catching the anxious line of his mouth before he made a face and squinted, waving away the light.

“Thought you’d get a kick out of it,” Steve said.

“C’mooon,” Billy said, rolling his eyes. “You’re such a bullshitter-”

“I’m *not* bullshit,” Steve said quickly. “I’m not.”

“*Okay* . Just seems like-”

“You’ll laugh your ass off if I explain it,” Steve said, stepping around a tree in front of them. Billy watched him wrap an arm around it and swing to the front, his backpack swinging off his shoulder. He looked like such a kid. Billy crossed behind him and stepped in front, walking backwards and shining the flashlight. He picked his pendant up out of his shirt and held it up for Steve to see.

“I won’t laugh this time,” he said. “This... *one* time.” He smiled and

Steve's mouth curved up as he looked away.

"This shit..." Steve took a big breath and stopped walking, staring ahead into the darkness. "It's for real. I don't go looking for these things for kicks. I look for them because I can't fucking sleep and I figure if I fight them maybe I can sleep again. But the other night... You and I, I mean, it was fun. I haven't had fun like that in a long time. Just kinda cut loose and like...laughed and..." His voice was softer now, he rolled the bat between his palms. "Which is *crazy*. But I just thought... I bring you out here, maybe it's less terrifying. More fun. Ya know? And I already know you can handle yourself." He raised his eyes and Billy knew too well the expression of somebody anticipating either a blow or a kiss-off from him.

*He had fun with me*, Billy thought.

Billy nodded slightly and exhaling smoke through his nose, he tipped up his chin and said, "Yeah, well I think you're just trying to impress me with your badass monster fighting skills. But I'm about to put you to shame, Harrington."

Steve grinned at that and spun his bat. "I don't need to impress you. You're already impressed."

"Oh really?" Billy said. "How do you figure that?"

"You've been impressed since you *met* me," Steve said, stepping around him. "Or you wouldn't try to beat me at everything."

"I don't think I tried so much as succeeded, pretty boy," Billy cracked.

"But we agree you're impressed," Steve said, pointing the bat at him. "Got it."

"Oh, and we agree you really want me to be impressed with you," Billy said, leaning into Steve, and maybe he tossed Steve one of the charming little bedroom smiles that made panties drop on the regular. That threw off Steve for a second. Billy could see him composing himself.

"I couldn't give less of a shit, asshole," Steve said. He clocked that

Steve sounded less dismissive and more like he was playing the game.

“Yeah right,” Billy said, “ as if-”

“Ssh!” Steve grabbed his arm. “Wait...I hear something...” Billy thought Steve was fucking with him, trying to one up him in the game, until he looked up and saw the abrupt alertness in Steve’s big eyes. Steve shoved him behind a boulder and ducked down, pulling Billy with him. Billy stayed quiet, if only out of sheer curiosity, and he watched Steve who stared, concentrating, as if tuning into some internal frequency. “I hear it,” Steve whispered, and he was still holding Billy’s arm. His eyes slipped shut, his lips parted, and Billy watched him breathe. “Do you hear it?”

Billy, feeling at a loss on the monster front, listened. His ears perked up and he tried, but he couldn’t hear anything monsterish, only the faint rustling of trees, a couple crickets, and certainly the beating of his own heart which picked up because Steve was hunched down close to him, his hand hot around Billy’s wrist.

“I don’t hear shit,” Billy whispered.

The idea that Steve knew anything on a subject about which he was clueless was frustrating. It made him want to tell Steve this was stupid and pointless anyway and take off but...he also wanted to impress Harrington. If he was a little dumber he would take the bat and not listen to Steve and insist he could do this himself. But he’d never been dumb.

Besides, Steve kept flirting...

Steve took off his backpack and dug out an aerosol can. The bat, he carefully handed to Billy. “I’ll need your lighter,” Steve said. He zipped his backpack, hitching it over both shoulders, and closed his eyes again. “Not yet though. It’s far away... just one. If it comes this way, we’ll ambush. I’ll go with the fire, you go with the bat, just stay clear of my...” Steve’s eyes popped open and he looked at Billy. “You’re not wearing cologne.”

Billy was distracted. Steve seemed to *really* know what he was doing unless it was all bullshit. But Steve was right, he was not bullshit.

Steve fought *monsters* and body checked him when they played basketball and took the first swing, and Steve was a couple inches away talking about Billy's cologne.

"Huh?"

"I dunno," Steve whispered, and his nose brushed Billy's hair. "You always wear cologne. You're not wearing anything."

"I ran out." His Aramis was all over his bedroom wall and he'd run out of his back-up. He held the bat in his left hand, Steve pressed in on his right, and Billy touched a finger to the tip of one nail angry nail just to relieve the tension a little. "Sayin' I stink?"

"No," Steve whispered. "You smell good."

Billy wished for a moment they could stay like that, huddled together behind a rock waiting for a monster that might never come, whispering in the warm night. He turned his head, and inhaled, as subtle as possible. Steve smelled like Steve; Polo and some girly brand of hairspray. "You wear Polo," Billy whispered. "But never too much. Just enough." He saw Steve's tongue peak out between his lips and he rested a hand on Steve's knee. He heard Steve's breath stutter and if he had been any less aware of every place Steve was touching him, he might have missed the slight movement of a thumb where Steve's hand still held Billy's wrist. There again, his thumb moved, and Billy ducked his head, just enough that he could still call it incidental, and his lips brushed Steve's temple, the hair damp with sweat that stuck there. Steve's hand moved and now his thumb was stroking Billy's palm, nothing less than deliberate. Billy moved his other hand just a little bit higher up Steve's thigh.

"Billy, what're we we doin'?" Steve whispered.

Billy licked his lips, summed up his courage and said, "That's up to you." And before he could quite stop himself he squeezed Steve's leg and whispered directly into Steve's ear, he said, "Pretty boy." He had called Steve that countless times and meant it as a compliment even when his tone said it was an insult and his heart was in his throat because his meaning could not be confused now.

*I'll die* , Billy thought, feeling Steve breathe against him. He tensed, imagining it all blowing up. Steve would shoot to his feet and say he wasn't any fag and was Billy crazy-

*That crazy bitch -*

"Yes," Steve said, and then in a very different tone he hissed, "Fuck! Gimme the Zippo!"

Now he heard it. The call of the demogorgon sounded kinda like a demon and kinda like a giant bird, clicking and growling, but he couldn't see it, couldn't even tell from what direction it came. The horror of that sound broke him out of the spell Steve had put him under and now he dug into his pocket for his Zippo and tossed it over.

"Do you see it?" Steve said, scrambling around and sinking down so his back was to boulder as he almost lay down on the forest floor. He spoke so softly it took Billy an extra second to understand him. Billy ducked down lower and wondered if they were actually about to be killed just because Billy had wanted Steve Harrington's dick so badly. Steve's mouth was tight and grim. "It's like at your...two o'clock."

Billy peaked over the boulder and squinted and when he saw it his stomach dropped somewhere into his feet. When Steve had said "bigger than a demodog" Billy had not assumed "also bigger than a large man." The thing was huge and it had long claws and it had big...leaves or something where its face should be. It was dark in the forest but Billy thought he saw *a lot* of teeth. There was something about it too beyond its frightening appearance, some inexplicable darkness that made Billy shudder.

"Shit," Billy whispered.

"Remember," Steve said. "I do the fire, you bat it back in my direction-"

"Steve-"

"Go!"

"Shit!"

Steve went right so Billy went left and they charged, Billy going around behind the creature just as Steve jumped into place in front of it and Billy heard the metallic flick of his lighter just before a burst of flame caught the monster as its arms reached out for Steve, who ducked back, holding his can firm in front of the Zippo. The demogorgon screamed and it sounded like something Billy had heard in nightmares. It spun around and Billy gripped his bat and swung hard so that it spun its tooth-petaled face back to Harrington. The thing felt like it was made of bricks when Billy swung at it, a sharp pain running up his arm though he didn't think he'd broken anything. He saw it bend as it spun, one of its arms swinging out.

“Steve! Watch your feet!”

Harrington smartly leapt over the arm as it attempt to take out his legs and Billy raised the bat over his head and brought it down neatly in the middle of the demogorgon's arm with all the force he could muster. That gave Steve the opportunity to whip some plastic bottle out of his backpack and then he was dousing the thing, throwing the Zippo, and running towards Billy, pushing him out the way just as the monster exploded in flames. Billy felt the awful heat of it as the full weight of Steve fell on top of him, crushing him into the muddy ground and he wanted to clap his hands to his ears to block the awful piercing scream of the thing as it burned up. It smelled terrible and Billy scrunched up his nose, and then Steve was easing off of him, but he stopped as he braced on his arms, lying atop Billy, now nose to nose.

“It's dying,” Steve said, his voice shaking, and Billy felt like the world went into a kind of hyper-reality. He could feel Steve's heart, the heavy press of his heaving chest, his thigh between Billy's legs, the puff of his breath, the cock in Steve's jeans feeling like it was getting hard against Billy's stomach.

“Yeah,” Billy said. He held Steve's shoulders in his hands, not knowing what to do with them.

*Kiss him.*

The monster stopped screaming and then all Billy heard was burning leaves. Steve said, “Oh! Shit! Fire!” He scrambled off of Billy,

jumping up. Billy went after him, feeling the end of that moment like a Greek tragedy. Steve was putting out the fire that was sparking in brush around the disgusting pile of smoking goop and black bones that was the demogorgon. He was whipping at it with the backpack and Billy joined him, stomping out the little bits of flame that were trying to spread, though Billy supposed the woods in a Hawkins spring were likely damp enough not to catch.

When the fire was out, Steve looked up at him and jogged over. "Hey, we did it!" He threw his hand up for a high five. Billy rolled his eyes even as he grinned, slapping a high five, and his breath hitched when Steve did not drop his hand but instead laced their fingers together.

" Yes ," Billy said, and barely got the word out before Steve was tugging him forward. Billy dropped the bat and grabbed Steve's collar with his other hand and they lurched into each other, mutually, their dry, warm lips meeting. The kiss was confused at first, and Billy wrapped his hand around Steve's neck to hold him still. They parted to open their mouths and breathe for a moment before kissing properly. Billy searched for a kiss he wasn't yet feeling and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt existed; Steve's lips a little stiff and resistant.

Billy pulled away again and said, "Man up, Harrington."

Steve tittered at that and mumbled, "Goddamn son of a..." He wrapped his arms around Billy and tilted his head and covered Billy's mouth with his own, his lips softer but determined and a little wet. His tongue played inside Billy who gripped Steve's hair and felt a tree hitting his arm because Steve had backed them up into a pine. Steve sank down a little and his palms came up to Billy's face. He broke away and Billy's head spun. He stood, panting, pressed up against Harrington, wanting and wanting so much he had room for no other thoughts. Steve just nodded, firmly now, as if coming to some decision, and kissed him again. Now teeth were nibbling, Steve's tongue licking at Billy's. Billy sounded a pleading little whimper that made his ears turn hot with embarrassment but only seemed to spur Steve on, his grip tightening as he moved to kiss Billy's neck, tugging his hair aside. He began to suck a mark there, changed his mind, and moved back to Billy's mouth.

Kisses, in Billy's experience, were a means to the greater end.

Or so he'd thought.

But Steve Harrington had never kissed him before.

*It's happening* , is all Billy could manage to think. *It's happening it's happening it's happening...*

Later Billy was mindful enough to realize that Steve was learning his mouth, finding that when Steve curled his tongue around Billy's and took it away again, Billy held him tighter, and that when he bit Billy's lip, Billy moaned just a little. He learned so quickly, like some alien intelligence adapting to a new planet. Steve really was the the best kisser at Hawkins High because he could discover in seconds just how somebody *wanted* to be kissed.

Steve's kiss left no room for Billy to lead and he forgot the notion existed. He just felt too good and Billy melted against him. His hands found their way to Steve's chest and slid down...down...

Steve broke their kiss and stared at Billy, eyes alight and apprehensive.

Billy licked his lips and inwardly pled with the universe.

His hand covered Steve's bulging crotch. "I'll make it so good, Harrington."

Steve nodded and said, "Uh huh, yeah." He fumbled with his jeans and the zip of his fly sounded loud in the quiet forest. Billy licked his hand and spat into it and then Steve's growing cock was in his hand, thick and hot and firm.

Billy had limited experience, even in California it wasn't as if high school guys were announcing to the world they liked dick. But in the few times he'd fucked around, guys didn't want to kiss, not when the real action was happening. That was some girly shit and Billy had picked up that idea. Only he wanted to now because Steve's kisses weren't exactly average. Still, he was enchanted by the Steve's face as Billy stroked him. Steve's mouth was wide open, that pretty mouth. Billy slid his hand up and down Steve's cock, occasionally thumbing



around the head. It wasn't rocket science but it seemed to be really doing it for Steve.

"C'mere, c'mon..." Steve tugged him forward and kissed him, humming into his mouth. "You looks so... God, you look so..."

"I look so what, huh?" Billy said against his lips. "Sexy?"

"Not tellin'," Steve breathed, and smiled into their kiss. "Ah..."

"Tell me," Billy said. "I look so what?" He stroked Steve a little harder.

"N-nah uh... God... Please...." Steve was fucking into Billy's hand, his zipper painfully biting into the back of Billy's hand but he didn't care just now, not with the feel of Steve's hips rolling into him as he arched back off the tree. Billy tangled his other hand into Steve's hair and pulled his head aside, attacking that mole sprinkled neck with his tongue and teeth. Steve's hands were up under his shirt, blunt nails trying to rake his back.

"I knew you'd be so fuckin' hot like this," Billy said."

"I'm gonna come," Steve breathed. "I'm gonna..."

Billy sped up his stroking and could not decide whether to watch his cock or watch his face, the decision seeming desperately important. The choice was taken away when Steve pulled him into a kiss again, moaning against his lips as he pulsed in Billy's hand, spilling over his fist.

Billy was already so hard in his jeans, he thought he would bust. But the sound of Steve Harrington having an orgasm... His moans were low and soft, contained, as if he was trying to hold back just how *much* he was feeling and he kept kissing Billy softly, sloppily, before Billy let go of his cock and shook his hand out, drops of cum sliding down his fingers into the dirt.

Steve zipped up his fly and leaned there against the tree at a forty-five degree angle and Billy turned and leaned next to him, watching the slow come-down, Steve's mouth still parted as he caught his breath, a light sheen of sweat along his brow.

Billy lit himself a cigarette, his own cock throbbing. He found he didn't want Steve to reciprocate just yet though, he felt too on edge, lit up, his heart as swollen as his dick. He was a little afraid that if Harrington made *him* come he would lose goddamn his mind and say "I love you" or something. Instead he smoked and watched Steve.

"You want me to..." Steve gestured vaguely to Billy's crotch.

"Nah." Billy shrugged, exhaling. He didn't miss Steve's frown..

"Oh, goddammit... Your Zippo." He nodded at the still smoking pile of monster goo. "It's...in there."

"*Harrington !*" Billy glared, partly for show. He loved his Zippo and all but he'd *just made Harrington come* . There was no comparison.

"I'll fish it out right now," Steve said, standing up straight. "Or I'll give you mine. If you want. It's a nice one actually."

Billy just blinked at him, trying to figure out a way to agree to Steve giving him a gift that wouldn't sound like that's what he wanted, and Steve snorted a laugh. "C'mon, let's get our stuff and hang out in the car, yeah? I still have that flask."

## Notes for the Chapter:

SO writing them setting the demogorgon fire I realized when they set one in fire in S1 it didn't die because they can heal themselves but I figured, as I have Steve suggest, it's weakened because it's cut off from the Upside Down. So I hope that works lol.